DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 378 HE 020 229

AUTHOR Stubbs, Paul R.
TITLE An Examination of the Academic Decision-Making Model at John Abbott College. AIR 1986 Annual Forum Paper.
PUB DATE Jun 86
NOTE 36p.; Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research (26th, Orlando, FL, June 22-25, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Administration; *Decision Making; *Faculty College Relationship; Foreign Countries; *Governance; Higher Education; Institutional Research; Interviews; Models; Participative Decision Making; Teacher Administrator Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *AIR Forum; *John Abbott College PQ

ABSTRACT

The academic decision-making model at John Abbott College in Quebec was evaluated, based on interviews with faculty, mid-level managers, and administrators. Interview responses indicated a need for better understanding of the procedural and communication lines of the decision-making process. A general belief existed that academic decisions were frequently made in isolation from the concerns of the college community. The structure was seen as appropriate, but input to the system and dissemination and implementation of decisions were seen as problematic. A number of respondents thought the academic decision-making process had too much emphasis on crisis management (i.e., the process was more reactive than proactive). Many respondents felt that there was too long a time lag between recommendations by the Academic Council and responses by the academic administration. The majority saw decision-making as a consultative process; however, some saw the mechanism to produce collegial participation as a sham or a method to avoid conflict and antagonism. It was recommended that the mechanism for input to the decision-making process be improved and that academic decisions be clearly enunciated to the college community. The interview questions and organizational charts are appended. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED280378

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ACADEMIC DECISION-MAKING MODEL AT JOHN ABBOTT COLLEGE

by

Paul R. Stubbs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

AIR

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH ANNUAL FORUM, ORLANDO, FLORIDA, JUNE 1986.

HE 020 327

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

for Management Research, Policy Analysis, and Planning

This paper was presented at the Twenty-Sixth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Marriott Orlando World Center, Orlando, Florida, June 22-25, 1986. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Ann K. Dickey, Chair
Forum Publications Editorial
Advisory Committee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
Background and Significance	2
PROCEDURES	8
RESULTS	9
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	10
REFERENCES	16
BIBLIOGRAPHY	17
APPENDICES	
A. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE	18
B. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: PEDAGOGICAL SERVICES	20
C. ACADEMIC DECISION-MAKING MODEL	22
D. INTERVIEW GUIDE	24

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ACADEMIC DECISION-MAKING MODEL AT JOHN ABBOTT COLLEGE

ABSTRACT

This study was initiated to evaluate the academic decision-making model at John Abbott College. Decision-making, especially in academic areas which influence the experience of all College community members, was seen as being of paramount importance in the overall functioning of an educational institution. Through this study, an attempt was made to ascertain the appropriateness of the academic decision-making model and, if necessary, to put forth recommendations for improvement.

Data were gathered through a series of structured interviews with employees in each of the following categories: Faculty, Middle-Management, Administration. These interviews were focused around an interview guide designed by this writer. Results were largely anecdotal in nature, as the interviews were made up of fairly open-ended questions, designed to illicit as complete a perceptual expression as possible from interviewees. No attempt to quantify was made, as it was felt that this might inhibit the expression of the interviewees or result in mathematical findings which would not readily lend themselves to recommendation formulation. Issues of reliability were not stressed, though future follow-up measures have been established which will, hopefully, come to terms with this area of concern.

These results indicated a general belief that academic decisions, despite a mechanism established to produce collegial participation, were frequently made in isolation from the concerns of College community

members at large. The structure was seen as appropriate, but facility of input to the system and dissemination and implementation of decisions were seen as problematic.

Based on these results, two general recommendations were formulated:

1) The mechanism for input to the decision-making process should be improved.

2) Academic decisions should be clearly enunciated to the entire College community.

When such a model is in place, smooth functioning of the College is greatly facilitated.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study was to examine the model used for academic decision-making at John Abbott College. If the perceptions and opinions accumulated through this examination had suggested an inappropriate model, suggestions for improvement would be made.

The questions addressed in this research included:

1) Is the academic decision-making model, as perceived by College personnel, a viable and appropriate one for the institution?
2) If this is not the case, what changes or improvements can be introduced?

The impetus for this study was the fact that a broad spectrum of perceptions seemed to exist concerning the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making on campus. These perceptions were expressed informally in a multitude of social and professional encounters between individuals from every stratum of the College community. It was seen that if these statements were to be of benefit, there was a need to analyze them systematically to determine patterns, if any, and to synthesize a model that met the needs of those involved. The perceptions expressed ranged along a continuum extending from complete satisfaction, at one pole, to total dissatisfaction at the other.

In order to proceed with the required systematic analysis, a series of structured interviews were conducted with employees in each of the following categories: Faculty, Middle-Management, and Administration. These interviews were focused around an interview guide designed by this writer (Appendix D). The results were largely anecdotal in nature

and are dealt with later in the paper. These interviews were an attempt to discern the degree to which perceptions were shared by those participating.

John Abbott College is part of the Québec CEGEP (Collège d'Education Général et Professionel) system, quite similar in nature to that of the American Community Colleges. Although these institutions are highly unionized, and there is frequent administration-syndicate friction, there has always been a strong attempt to utilize a collegial approach to academic decision-making. In such a milieu, a workable model is imperative.

Background and Significance

Academic decision-making, defined for the purpose of this practicum as the formulation of policies pertaining to academic matters, is actually a relatively complex procedure. This complexity is due largely to the interaction and political alliances of those formulating the policies, rather than the substance of the policies themselves. For this reason, it was seen as appropriate that this study be undertaken within the framework of a specific political context, with major focus on one aspect of that context.

Institutions of post-secondary education, if they are to function effectively and efficiently require a great deal of input from personnel when in the process of policy formulation. This fact has been clarified and emphasized in the literature (Drucker: 1973:566).

The emphasis on participation by all those involved in the various stages of the decision-making process is repeated by Powers and Powers (1983), as they put forth the argument that participatory management can be made to work, especially in collegial institutions. The essential

element here is that administrators must guide the process, encouraging and assisting those taking part. Participatory management is not an abrogation of administrative rights and responsibilities, it is, rather, an opportunity to reach institutional goals and increase staff motivation levels at the same time.

The benefits, a more readily accepted decision and more involved, satisfied personnel, can also accrue to the administrator who wishes to be seen as effective. "In order to be effective, administrators need to be sensitive to how decisions are made, establish a risk-neutral culture, attend to critical support groups, . . . increase communication as perceived uncertainty increases, use organization culture wisely (Whetten & Cameron: 1984)." The advantages to faculty, administrator and institution would seem to argue well for an academic decision-making process in which as large a group as possible participates constructively and does so with the belief that their input is being seriously considered. Austin and Gamson (1983), recognizing the positive aspects of the multi-input approach, but noting a current weakness in this area, use a forward-looking stance when they state, "In the future more attention must be paid to gaining knowledge about the various college work groups, improving organizational practices and decision-making structures and making them more collaborative."

As a motivator, faculty involvement in the decision-making process has perhaps never been as important as it is in these days of scant resources. During a period of retrenchment, when financial rewards can rarely be brought into play, some method of encouraging faculty to draw satisfaction from factors other than financial is imperative. Terms such as "burnout" are becoming clichés, but this does not negate

the fact that the symptoms they describe do exist, and are exacerbated by financial worries. "Securing faculty involvement is the most important element for implementing change. Faculty members are crucial to the quality of a college and often represent underutilized or untapped sources of expertise in many areas. Clear and honest communication is also fundamental to change. All participants in the decision-making process must be informed as well as listened to (Kolenbraden: 1983)."

The issue of perception should also be emphasized. If faculty are participating but perceive that their input is being disregarded, even if it is being taken into consideration, part of the cycle is missing and the mechanism breaks down. The literature indicates repeatedly that administrators must acknowledge faculty input as being essential to the decision-making process. This type of acknowledgement is perhaps no where more important than in the community college setting.

The need for this type of study has been emphasized on many occasions by members of all personnel groups at John Abbott College. The Academic Dean has frequently stressed that unless participants contribute to decision-making, and perceive that their contributions are being listened to, new policies will rarely be well received or implemented properly. It was hoped that this practicum would produce findings that could be used to ameliorate this essential process.

John Abbott College, as is the case with most medium and large educational institutions, has a fairly high level of administrative complexity. These levels are schematically described in Appendices A and B.

The Board of Governors is a body constituted by Provincial Legislation, and its composition is constant throughout the CEGEP network. There are three ex-officio members of the College Administration (Director General, Academic Dean, Director of Student Services), members elected from each of the College Associations (Faculty, Students, Support Non-Teaching Professionals), and a number of Socio-Economic members selected from the community through open elections. For elected members, the mandate is one of two years duration.

The Board is the ultimate decision-making group for the College. Usually, the scope of this group is one of great breadth (College budget, selection and evaluation of the Director General, official communications to the Provincial Ministry of Education), and it rarely intervenes in the day-to-day functioning of the College, other than indirectly. Of late, in view of major labor disputes between faculty unions and the Provincial Government, the Board of Governors has become a highly political forum which has been used as a medium to express "partisan" views. In practical terms, the Board of Governors is largely supportive of the views and beliefs of the Director General, given his legitimate, expert, referrent and connection powers (Hersey and Blanchard; 1982:178-179). In virtually all of the recent controversial issues, the Director General's suggestions have been followed by the Board.

The next level of organization, i.e., the Management team of the College, functions on a much more informal basis than does the Board. Although the members of this group (Appendix A) meet in sub-groups quite frequently, the main Management meetings are held every two weeks during the semester. The stated "style" of this group is one of collegiality and consensus-seeking, but in fact many decisions are

reached in an authoritarian manner by the Director General. This fact is privately acknowledged by many members of the Management group, and is seen by some as necessary in the formulation of efficient decisions. The academic administrators function as autonomous members of the Management team when dealing with issues of College-wide importance. This approach to leadership, high task and low relationship, is resented by at least some of the Management group because it is seen as inappropriate for this level of employee (Hersey and Blanchard: 1982).

The academic administration sub-group of the Management team (Appendix B) is headed by the Academic Dean. In sharp contrast to the style of the Director General, the Academic Dean may be characterized as a leader who places a high importance on relationships and a much lower one on production. This sub-group also meets formally every two weeks, and the meetings are conducted in an extremely democratic manner. The Academic Dean does have position power but resorts to it rarely, and is much more interested in arriving at decisions through group consensus. The atmosphere and approach to these meetings seems to be carried over by the participants into their day-to-day dealings in respective areas of concern. Academic administrators rarely have difficulty in implementing these decisions as they have been instrumental in the formulation stage. Whereas the Director General is an extremely private person, unwilling to disclose very much about himself and sometimes resistant to feedback, the Academic Dean is an open administrator, constantly seeking feedback and input (Hersey and Blanchard: 1982).

The academic decision-making model (Appendix C) is one which has evolved during the years since the birth of John Abbott College.

One of the key components in this process is the Academic Council. This body is composed of representatives of all of the groups with input to the Board of Governors, except the external interests, and focusses on the internal day-to-day functioning of the school.

Any campus group or individual may make proposals or bring issues to the Council. As these issues are often readily categorized (curriculum, teaching environment, etc.), several standing sub-committees have been established and develop expertise through repeated exposure to problems of a similar nature. The results of sub-committee work are brought to the Council for ratification, and if this ratification is forthcoming, a recommendation is presented to the Academic Administration. The Academic Administration then must follow one of the courses of action explained below.

If the Academic Administration agrees with the recommendation, it becomes incumbent on them to "sell" the idea to the rest of the Management group. During this process the recommendation must be evaluated from all prospectives (political, fiscal, etc.), and the general welfare of the College and external communities taken into consideration. Should the Academic Administration not be successful in this endeavour, they may well, and this has been the case in a few instances, be caught in a "crossfire" between the Academic Council and the rest of Management.

On the other hand, if the recommendation of the Academic Council is not agreed to by the Academic Administration, the task becomes one of consolidating their position with that of the total Management group, and then seeking out alternatives which will be seen by Academic Council as having positive potential.

These, then are the formally established mechanisms and structures currently used to arrive at academic decisions. It was within this framework that the present study was undertaken.

PROCEDURES

This study which was of a descriptive rather than an experimental nature, included the following procedures:

1) An interview guide (Appendix D) was devised.
2) A stratified random sample of College personnel was drawn. This sample included Administration, Middle Management and Faculty. The three groups totalled approximately 350 at this College, with the individual groups having memberships as follows: Faculty 300, Middle Management 35, Administration 15. The stratified random sample consisted of 70 individuals, or approximately 20% of the population being studied. Within each stratum, interviewees were randomly selected. For example, 60 Faculty members were selected from the Faculty listing using a random number generator.
3) The questions were asked during individual or small group interviews.
4) The findings were analyzed by isolating common trends of thought both across and within groups in the sample.
5) The analysis of findings was considered in light of the existent decision-making model, to determine whether recommendation for improvement should be made.

As the decision-making process is considered to have political overtones, confidentiality was guaranteed to all interviewees.

The data were gathered and analyzed from an anecdotal perspective in an attempt to detect actual or perceived shortcomings in the input reception and utilization stages of the decision-making process.

RESULTS

A synopsis of responses to each of the questions on the interview guide follows. The approach utilized was to identify common trends of respondent thought. Unless indicated otherwise, these respondent commonalities occur across interviewed groups. Comments in different, but redundant phrasing have been omitted (N=70).

Question One: How would you describe, in general terms, the academic decision-making process at John Abbott?

Response	Percentage
Good and getting better.	22
The process is actually vested in departments as nothing even gets to Council if it is not cleared by the department.	28
Too much emphasis on "crisis" management.	40
There are actually many methods used to arrive at academic decisions.	10

Question Two: Which of the following terms, if any, would you apply to this decision-making process?

Response

Term	Absolute	Qualified	Total	Percentage
Unilateral	8	15	23	33
Consultative	12	30	42	60
Haphazard	3	9	12	17

Response (cont.)

Term	Absolute	Qualified	Total	Percentage
Collegial	13	29	42	60
Democratic	15	36	51	73
Cumbersome	20	41	61	87
Well-defined	12	13	25	36
Authoritarian	2	6	8	11
Laissez-faire	1	6	7	10

Note: Most of the qualifications involved frequency or consistency. For example 6 respondents, referring to incidents when Academic Council recommendations were rejected by the Administration indicated, that on these occasions, though not always, the process had been authoritarian.

Question Three: What do you see as the "formal" aspects of decision-making, if any, here at the College?

Response	Percentage
The progression from Departments to Sub-Committees to Council to Academic Administration.	63
Committee meetings	30
There are no formal aspects.	10

Question Four: What do you see as the "informal" aspects, if any, of the decision-making process here at the College?

Response	Percentage
Working through alternatives by departments.	28
Discussions in informal groups of concerned faculty.	35
People who work with policies but are not part of policy-making groups.	21

	Response (cont.)	Percentage
	Interpersonal abilities of the faculty.	15
	Lobbying; pressure groups.	21

Question Five: Is there one group on or off campus, which has the largest "say" in academic decision-making?

Response	Percentage
Academic Council	80
Academic Administration	10
Government	5
No	5

Question Six: What factors do you see as being the most influential in this decision-making?

Response	
Local interest groups	14
Budget	75
Union contract	80
Influential individuals	14
Appropriate consultation	25
Quality of presentation	28
Desire to maintain "peace"	40

Question Seven: What if any, are the main disadvantages of the approach taken to decision-making at John Abbott?

Response	Percentage
Takes too much time.	83
Cumbersome	79
No individual can make decisions.	45
Decisions not made until crisis arises.	88

Response (cont.)	Percentage
Little, if any overview	70
Consultation is merely a sham.	14

Question Eight: What, if any, are the main advantages of the approach taken to academic decision-making at John Abbott?

Response	Percentage
Greatest possible involvement of greatest number of people.	60
Most realistic approacy, yielding a sense of belonging.	23
Shared decisions	23
Democratic	36
Consensus seeking	14

Question Nine: How would you contrast the existent decision-making process with that used at other colleges in the area?

Response	Percentage
More collegial	61
Middle of the road	23
Democratic	42
More representative here	27

Question Ten: How would you improve the academic decision-making process used here?

Response	
More overview	14
More involvement	14
Increase communication and make more precise.	78
More sincere consultation	28

Response (cont.)	Percentage
Give credit when credit is due.	7
Develop an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation.	35

Note: Percentages for individual responses may not equal 100 as interviewees frequently gave more than one response. Percentages have been rounded to nearest whole number.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, it can be deduced that although there is a fairly broad spectrum of perception concerning the academic decision-making model at John Abbott College, it is, in principle, accepted by the Community. This is not to say that the approach is functioning at an optimum level, but that the foundation for an excellent system is in place. The data indicate that wholesale changes are not required, but rather that a fine-tuning would seem to be desirable. The current model would seem to require the following improvements.

The structures which are in place, and how they can be used, should be made clear to the entire College Community. This would respond to the relatively large portion of respondents who did not feel that the process was well-defined. If the procedural and communication lines are more widely understood, they will perhaps be used more effectively and efficiently. Once this familiarization has occurred, this study could be repeated to determine what effect, if any, a broader understanding would produce.

The theme of crisis management was mentioned quite frequently by interviewees, usually in the negative sense of "putting out fires."

The process was seen as being reactive rather than proactive. The degree of crisis intervention necessary could be reduced by creating an overview of anticipated occurrences, and beginning to formulate decisional responses, prior to the onset of any particular academic year. In this way, the process would be perceived as more efficient, given that the degree of error caused by "panic" decision-making would be reduced.

Many respondents, from all strata, viewed the process as cumbersome. They stated that the time lag between Academic Council recommendations and Academic Administration responses was too long, that there were often several issues being decided at the same time, and that the contrasts of recommendation and decision were often not known and/or understood by those not on Academic Council. These difficulties could be addressed through a pre-established timeline to be followed by the Academic Council. This would have to be closely aligned with the rest of the Management group. Interim reports would also be useful. The timeline should, of course, be one which encourages rapidity of response. Furthermore, the recommendations of Council and the Academic Administration response should be made widely public. In general, the process seems to need "tightening up."

The consultative aspect of the cycle, seen as positive in this collegial context, was stressed by many of the respondents. There was, however, a small contingent who viewed this as lip-service or indeed a "ploy" on the part of the Administration. While it should be understood that consultation does not necessarily mean acquiesence, it would be helpful to the process if this consultation were truly a constructive and participatory act, and seen as such, rather than a sham or method to avoid conflict and antagonism.

These recommendations, then, may be grouped into two major categories The first deals with minor modifications to the process (timeline, pro-active rather than reactive, etc.), and the second with communication. The latter suggests that the process will operate better if it is more widely understood as to structure and function.

The recommendations, if implemented, would ameliorate a process, and the public perception of that process, in an area key to the overall functioning of the College. The implications, in an academic institution, for an improved academic decision-making process, are far-reaching indeed. It is hoped that these direct and indirect improvements will go a long way to bolstering the effectiveness and efficiency of John Abbott College.

REFERENCES

Austin, A.E., and Gamson, Z.F. Academic Workplace: New Demands, Heightened Tensions. ASHE - ERIC/ Higher Education Research Report No.10; Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1983.

Drucker, P.F. Management: Tasks, Responsibilities and Practices. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. Management and Organizational Behaviour: Utilizing Human Resources. 4th ed., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982.

Kolenbraden, H.M. Internal Policies and Strategies of Implementing Change with Limited Resources. Planning for Higher Education, 1983.

Powers, D.R., and Powers, M.F. Making Participatory Management Work. San Francisco; Jossey-Brass, 1983.

Whetten, D.A., and Cameron, K.S. Organizational and Administrative Effectiveness in Higher Education. Paper read at National Conference on Higher Education, Chicago, March, 1984.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blocker, C.E., and Bender, L.W., and Martorana, S.V., The Political Terrain of American Postsecondary Education. Fort Lauderdale, Flo: Nova University Press, 1975.

Bogue, E.G., and Briggs, R.O., "Institutional Policy and It's Abuses," Journal of Higher Education. Vol. XLV. No.5 (May, 1974)

Drucker, P.F., Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, and Practices. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Easton, D., A Framework for Political Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentiss-Hall, Inc., 1965.

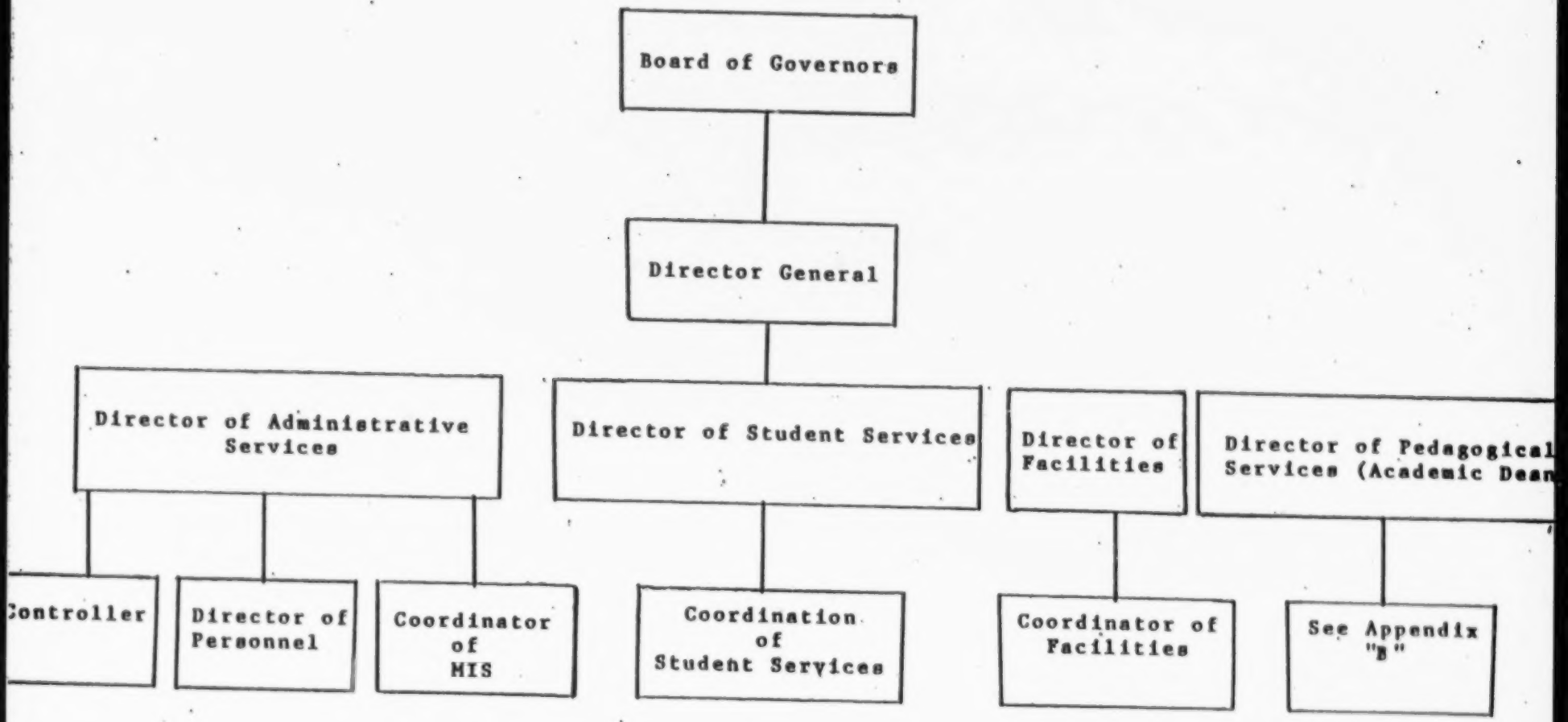
Martorana, S.V., and Kuhns, E. Managing Academic Change: Interactive Forces and Leadership in Higher Education. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass, 1975.

Wergin, J.F., "The Evaluation of Organizational Policy Making: A Political Model," Review of Educational Research. No.1, Vol. 46, 1976.

Appendix A

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

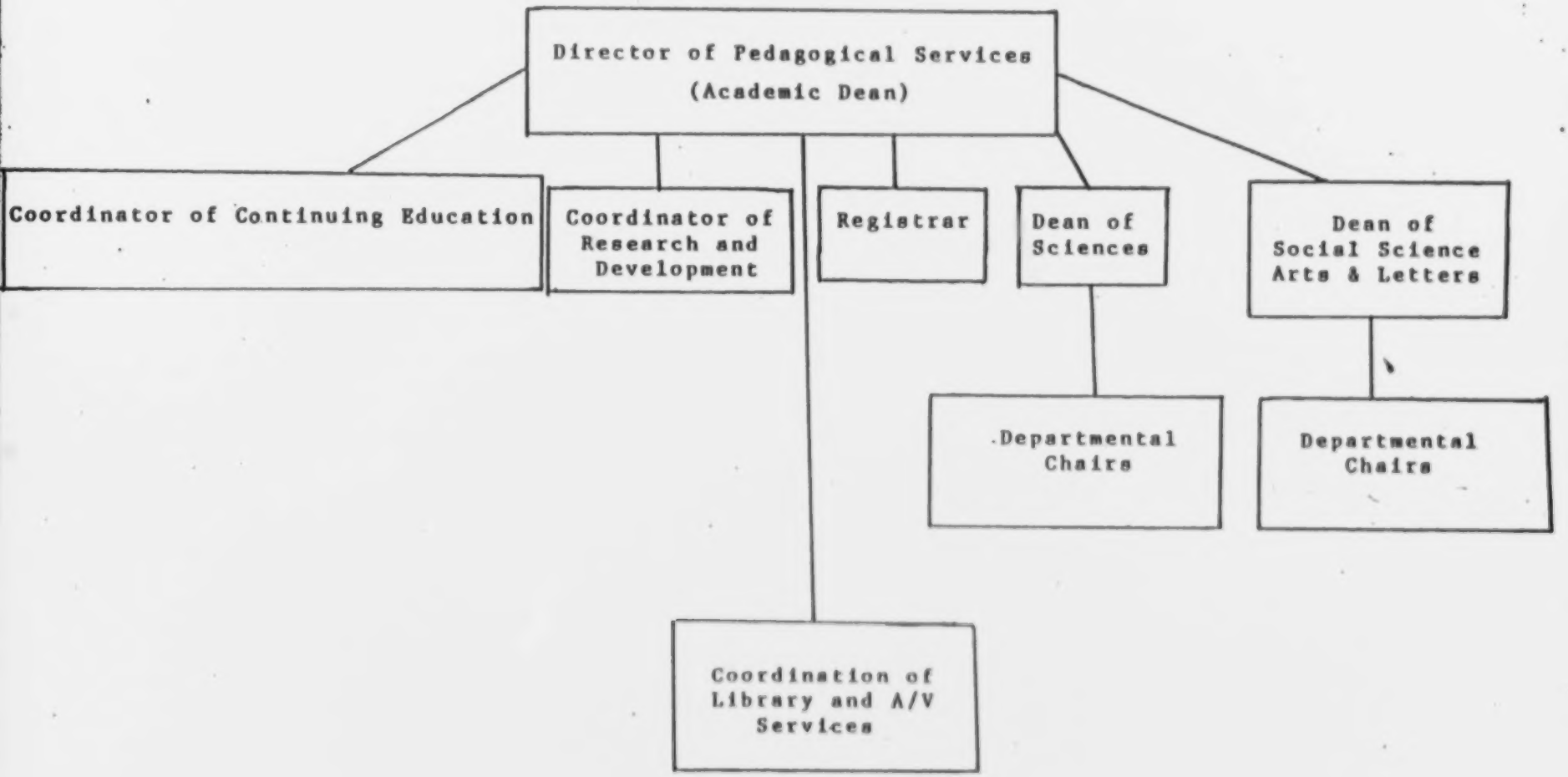
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



Appendix B

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: PEDAGOGICAL SERVICES

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART: PEDAGOGICAL SERVICES

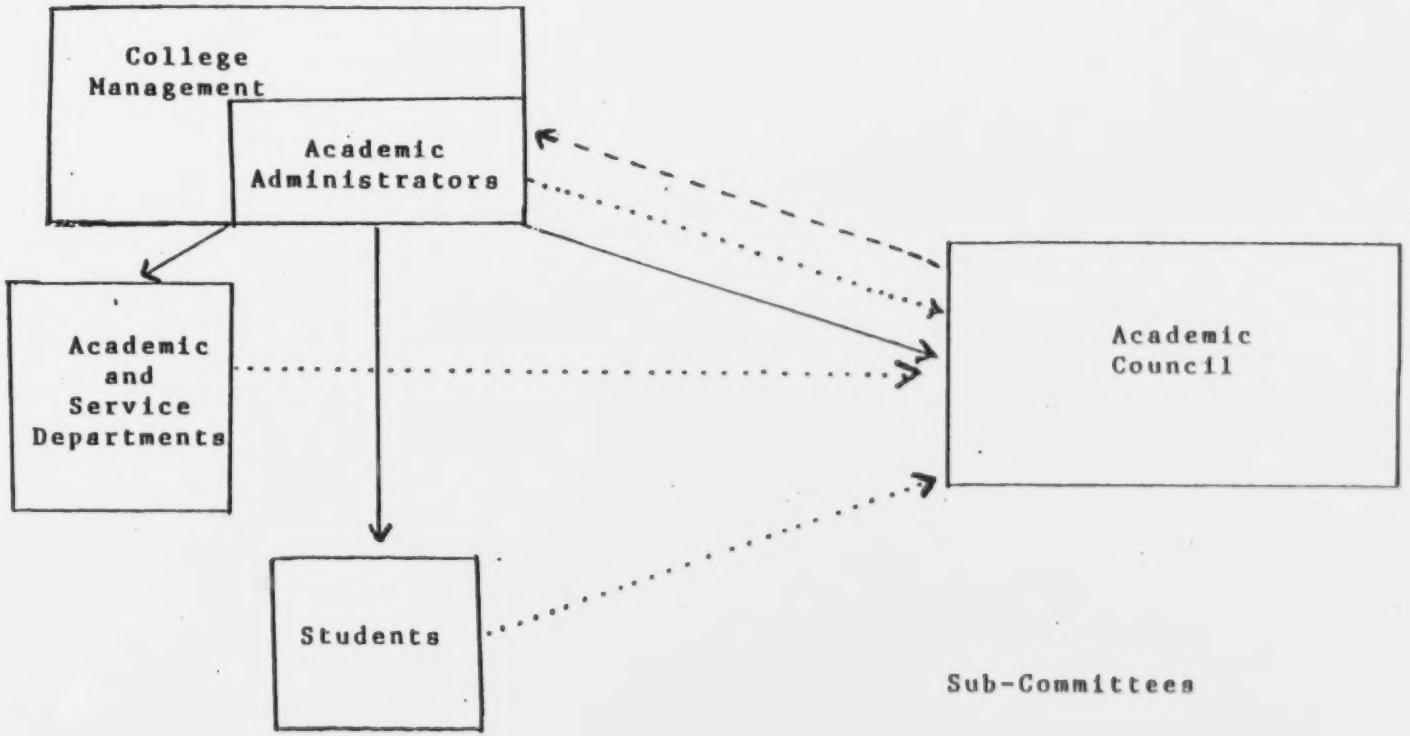


Appendix C

ACADEMIC DECISION-MAKING MODEL

ACADEMIC DECISION MAKING MODEL

JOHN ABBOTT COLLEGE



Appendix D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

ACADEMIC DECISION-MAKING AT JOHN ABBOTT COLLEGE

INTERVIEW FORM

Faculty
Middle-Management
Administration

PREPARATION STATEMENT TO ALL INTERVIEWEES

This interview is being conducted as part of a project I am doing. This project is required within the framework of a course which I am taking. It is hoped that along with helping me meet course requirements, the findings will assist in the improvement of academic decision-making here at John Abbott.

The responses you give to my questions today will be used in the project, but they will not be attributed to you. I would like to have you speak as candidly as possible, with the knowledge that you will remain anonymous. This interview is not being taped, and your name will not appear in the written notes I take during the interview.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) How would you describe, in general terms, the academic decision-making process at John Abbott?

2) Which of the following terms, if any, would you apply to this decision-making process?

Unilateral, consultative, haphazard, collegial, democratic, cumbersome, well-defined, authoritarian, laissez-faire.

3) What do you see as the "formal" aspects of decision-making, if any, here at the College?

4) What do you see as the "informal" aspects, if any, of the decision-making process, here at the College?

5) Is there one group, on or off campus, which has the largest "say" in academic decision-making?

6) What factors do you see as being the most influential in this decision-making?

7. What, if any, are the main disadvantages of the approach taken to academic decision-making at John Abbott?

8. What, if any, are the main advantages of the approach taken to academic decision-making at John Abbott?

9. How would you contrast the existent decision-making process with that used at other Colleges in the area?

10. How would you improve the academic decision-making process used here?